



## **St. Laurence, Coquitlam: The Induction of The Rev. Eric Mason**

### **Holy Cross Day: September 14, 2016**

#### **1 Corinthians 1:18-24**

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

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It will stick in my memory for a while that as we were fixing the date for this induction and Douglas Fenton and I were exchanging emails about the arrangements, he appended a comment to the end of an email that read something like this: “Holy Cross Day for an induction....interesting.”

Without getting into what *he* might have meant by this, let me say that from my perspective it is interesting, very interesting, it is rich, very rich and it is significant, very significant that this Feast of the Holy Cross, of all days, should be the day of this new beginning for St. Laurence.

And so, my friends, I have to wonder: what might this mean for all of us? What does it mean that, of all days, the mysterious and loving God we believe is real and active in our lives has conspired that this Holy Cross Day should be the day of this new beginning? And in that we will, of course, never know for sure what this *is* all about, how can we be open to what it *might* be about? How can we be open to and intrigued by what God as crucified and risen, what God as giver of new light and life, what God as liberator from bondage, might be suggesting to us on this day of new beginnings and

also in the days ahead, when new beginnings give way to a more comfortable familiarity which in turn gives way to an even more mature partnership between incumbent and parish?

Holy Cross Day itself, of course, has ancient origins. It is connected to the dedication, in the year 335, of Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre built where St. Helena, mother of Constantine allegedly discovered the true cross during her archeological pilgrimage to significant sites of the Holy Land. Celebrated with more of a sense of jubilation than Good Friday, Holy Cross Day focuses on giving thanks for and venerating the cross with an emphasis on its redemptive and life-giving power.

But, of course, the cross is still, after all, the cross. And so any thankfulness or any veneration must first look upon the humiliation, the powerlessness and the loss of control that the cross is about before it is about exaltation, before it is about the power of God, before it is about victory. And so the cross of Christ must always say to us that there is no resurrection without the experience of death, no light without the awareness of the darkness that it has overcome, no liberation without the memory of imprisonment, no openness to new life without the relinquishment of the old life that, whether we were aware of it or not, had controlled and limited us.

It is this last dimension of the cross that Roman Catholic writer Ron Rolheiser fixes on, as he makes the connection between the kinds of lives we are to live out of our baptismal identity that itself enacts the death and resurrection of Jesus. He says of our lives: "In order to come to fuller life and spirit we must constantly be letting go of present life and spirit." In other words, in order to receive the new life that is our future, we must let go of what has been or what *is seen* to be life-giving, but what *is actually* too small, too confining, too stalled out. For Rolheiser, then, the cross is a way of living that runs counter to the wisdom of the world, wisdom that would say "hold on to your life at all costs." Instead the cross says: expect that in this life that you will be dying, you will be letting go of what for you is life in order to receive new life.

And so I wonder...what of this speaks both to one Eric Mason and to the people of St. Laurence as we all mark and celebrate the beginning of their relationship today? What that was *life* for Eric, a person coming here from another country, is the cross of Christ asking him to die to, to let go of in order to receive the new life that is before him? And for the people of St. Laurence: what that has been life-giving in the past and even in the present moment is the cross of Christ asking you to let go of, to move beyond in order to receive the new life that has been prepared for you?

And, of course, these will not be just the questions of today, will they? For as Rolheiser points out "In order to come to fuller life and spirit, we must *constantly* be letting go of present life and spirit," the emphasis here being on the word *constantly*. And so, Eric and the people of St. Laurence, this understanding of the cross of Christ says that the path of dying daily will be the path of life for both of you—for you, Eric, and for you, people of St. Laurence.

"Holy Cross Day for an induction.....interesting."

What else is interesting is a quote I pulled from Eric's counseling website. I'm imagining that it was meant to paint a picture of what the therapeutic process is all about and about what Eric's own stance is related to assisting clients in embracing the new life to which they may be called in the therapeutic process. Interestingly enough the quote is not from any of the many, many theorists or practitioners from the realm of psychology. Rather it is from Henri Nouwen, Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer and theologian whose interests were rooted primarily in psychology, pastoral

ministry, spirituality, social justice and community (to name a few): Henri Nouwen, who after nearly two decades of teaching at academic institutions including the University of Notre Dame, Yale Divinity School and Harvard Divinity School, let all that go, to the surprise of many and in contradiction to what conventional wisdom would have suggested that he do. Nouwen let it all go and went on to work with mentally and physically handicapped people at the L'Arche Daybreak community in Richmond Hill, Ontario.

Here is what Nouwen says:

“To wait open-endedly is an enormously radical attitude toward life. So is to trust that something will happen to us that is far beyond our imagining. So, too, is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life, trusting that God molds us according to God’s love and not according to our fear. The spiritual life is a life in which we wait, actively present to the moment, trusting that new things will happen to us, new things that are far beyond our own imagination, fantasy, or prediction. That, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control.”

Eric and people of St. Laurence, it *is* interesting, it *is* rich, it *is* significant that this day of all others is the day that marks and celebrates yours and our new beginning together. May it be, I pray, the beginning of a life that mirrors the divine life: a life of dying so that new things may be born, a life of liberation so that new freedom may be found and a life of letting go so that day after day *God* may place your future in your hands.